United Nations A/50/PV.49

General Assembly
Fiftieth Session

Official Records

49th plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 November 1995, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Freitas do Amaral . . . . . (Portugal)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Peerthum (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

Agenda item 156 *(continued)*

Multilingualism

Draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1

Amendments: A/50/1.8; A/50/L.9; A/50/L.14

The Acting President: I should like to draw the attention of members to document A/50/L.14, which contains the two amendments proposed orally by Australia this morning.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 and the amendments thereto contained in documents A/50/L.8, A/50/L.9 and A/50/L.14, the last.

In accordance with rule 90 of the rules of procedure, the amendments are voted on first. Rule 90 also stipulates that:

> "When two or more amendments are moved to a proposal, the General Assembly shall first vote on the amendment furthest removed in substance from the original proposal and then on the amendment next furthest removed therefrom, and so on until all the amendments have been put to the vote. Where, however, the adoption of one amendment necessarily implies the rejection of another amendment, the latter amendment shall not be put to the vote. If one or more amendments are adopted, the amended proposal shall then be voted upon."

We shall proceed to take a decision first on the amendment proposed by Malaysia, contained in document A/50/L.9, which is furthest removed in substance from the original proposal. Depending on the result of the vote, we may or we may not vote on the amendment proposed by Japan, contained in document A/50/L.8, and on that proposed by Australia contained in paragraph 2 of document A/50/L.14. We shall then proceed to take a decision on the amendment proposed by Australia in paragraph 1 of document A/50/L.14.

If there is no objection to this procedure, I shall take it that the Assembly agrees to it.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/40/L.6/Rev.1 and the proposed amendments thereto.

I call on the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Perfiliev (Director, General Assembly Affairs Division): I have been informed that the adoption of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 would not give rise to programme budget implications.

95-86511 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

The Acting President: Before calling on those representatives who wish to explain their votes before the voting, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Birenbaum (United States of America): The United States has requested a vote on this draft resolution and will vote "no".

We fully appreciate and respect multilingualism and the importance of providing interpretation and access to United Nations documents in the official languages of the Organization.

We are concerned, however, that the provisions of the resolution before us go beyond accepted concepts of multilingualism within the United Nations system. The text as currently drafted raises a number of issues, not least of which is the fact that it would alter existing rules without following the proper procedures.

The second preambular paragraph introduces the concept of a "corollary" to universality, "multilingualism". To our knowledge, this concept has not been accepted by the General Assembly.

The fifth preambular paragraph is inconsistent with operative paragraph 3 in that it calls for all applicants for United Nations positions to have command of two of the official languages.

Concerning the sixth preambular paragraph, our delegation has noted on several occasions that budgetary constraints impact on all activities of the Organization and cannot be ignored.

Concerning the eighth preambular paragraph, we are not aware of any mandate which requires that the United Nations become in effect a language school for Member States and staff. In fact, the Fifth Committee, the competent body on these issues, awaits a request from the Secretary-General on the United Nations language teaching programme and will then consider the issue.

Concerning operative paragraph 3, we believe that, as drafted, the language would request the Secretary-General to ensure that competence in two languages would be a factor in promotions at all levels of the United Nations. The existing rules on language competence in relation to promotion do not apply to the support staff.

We have concerns regarding operative paragraph 4, which calls for "equality" of the two working languages in hiring and promotions. This represents a new criterion, and we are not clear as to its meaning. We assume that it is not the intent of this language to establish a quota system for hiring much like the geographical distribution system. However, the provision is ambiguous in that regard.

Finally, we note that there has been no estimate of expenditures, as required by rule 153 of the rules of procedure, for this draft resolution. From this we surmise that there will be no expenditure of any kind in implementing the provisions of this draft resolution and that, therefore, all the activities required by this draft resolution can and will be accomplished within existing resources. In our view, a paragraph to this effect should have been included in this draft resolution.

Mr. Yoogalingam (Malaysia): I wish to take this opportunity to appeal to members of the General Assembly to give careful consideration before a vote is taken on the proposed amendment, in document A/50/L.9, to operative paragraph 3 of the draft resolution in document A/50/L.6/Rev.1.

The draft resolution in that document embodies a concept dear to us all, and would contribute to the promotion of multilingualism in the Organization. However, we are of the view that it would place those countries whose native tongue is not one of the six United Nations languages at a serious disadvantage. It is indeed ironic that, in the quest to achieve parity between the six United Nations languages, those already disadvantaged would be further discriminated against.

We recognize that the revised operative paragraph 3 in document A/50/L.6/Rev.1 attempts to take on board some of the concerns expressed by those countries whose native tongue is not one of the six United Nations languages. However, we are of the view that it does not adequately address our concerns: it is inconsistent with multilingualism and does not safeguard the interests of those whose mother tongue is not one of the six United Nations languages. It would have been helpful if the sponsors of the draft resolution had been prepared to accept the word "encourage" instead of the word "ensure" in the current draft resolution. The word "encourage" is the term used in previous resolutions and is one that could help forge a consensus on this draft resolution.

As we have had insufficient time to consider the draft resolution in question, and we would request the sponsors to exercise patience and understanding for those of us who have serious problems with operative paragraph 3.

Ms. Eerikäinen (Finland): It is a long-standing and firm policy of Finland not to oppose the inclusion of new items on the agenda of the General Assembly. The necessary corollary of this policy is that delegations must be given adequate time and adequate opportunity to study new proposals so that a consensus or a largely satisfactory compromise solution can be reached by Member States.

In this case, those conditions have, unfortunately, not been met. In our view, there would have been room to seek compromise, and further efforts should have been made to see whether the draft resolution on this important item could have been adopted by consensus. It was on this ground, and this ground only, that Finland voted in favour of the motion to defer treatment of this item yesterday, and is also why Finland will abstain in any and all votes on the text of the draft resolution today.

I want to emphasize that our votes yesterday and today must not be construed as being in any way against multilingualism. On the contrary: Finland considers the issue before us to be of great importance to all States Members of the United Nations. Itself a constitutionally bilingual country, Finland values linguistic and cultural diversity and supports strict observance of the rules concerning the equality of the six official languages and of the working languages of the United Nations.

Mr. Ladsous (France) (*interpretation from French*): I have taken the floor in order to ask that members of the General Assembly do not put into effect the amendment proposed by the delegation of Japan or the one tabled by the delegation of Malaysia. In my explanations I will concentrate on the Japanese amendment.

Even before it proposed its amendment, the Japanese delegation asked us for our understanding for the situation of nationals of countries where one of the official languages of the United Nations is not in common use. To require of them, on recruitment, mastery of two official languages, at least one of which must be a working language of the Secretariat, would be likely to cause them serious problems. In fact, the sponsors of the draft resolution, showing great sympathy for the concerns expressed by the Japanese delegation, were won over completely to their point of view. I should like to emphasize that this was not a self-evident step, because it involved giving up an important, innovative element in the initial draft of the resolution, in document A/50/L.6.

We have therefore proposed in the revised draft resolution to return to the legal status quo ante by sticking strictly to the provisions of resolution 2480 B (XXIII) of 21 December 1968, that is to say, in requiring a staff member at the moment of recruitment to be able to use one of the working languages of the Secretariat or one of the working languages of a United Nations organ in the case of staff members recruited for that organ and whose contracts are for no more than two years.

Finally, and also as in General Assembly resolution 2480 B (XXIII), our revised draft resolution calls for the knowledge of a second official language to be taken into account for promotion within and between grades. We therefore believe that the concerns expressed by some Asian delegations have been fully taken into account in the revised draft. The Assembly will understand that the sponsors cannot fall short of what has already been agreed upon in previous resolutions; that they cannot sanction a regression in the existing law. That would clearly be contrary to the spirit of our draft, and it would inevitably comfort and succour the very practices our resolution is intended to condemn.

The amendment proposed by the Japanese delegation is deliberately vague in its wording. A simple encouragement for staff members to use one more official language in addition to a Secretariat working language does not imply any obligation on the Secretariat, and we have a good idea that, in practice, such a formula would have no effect.

Like the amendment tabled by Malaysia, the Japanese amendment opens the door to all kinds of skullduggery with particular reference to the get-out clause for nationals whose mother tongue is not an official language of the United Nations. For all these reasons, and expressing the viewpoint of the sponsors as I do so, I ask through you, Sir, that all delegations vote against both the amendment proposed by Japan and the one proposed by Malaysia.

However, I do find it possible to agree with the two amendments proposed by the Permanent Representative of Australia. I thank him for his two suggestions, which we will be able to vote for.

Mr. Laclaustra (Spain) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Spanish delegation wishes to make some

brief comments on the amendments put forward by Malaysia and Japan to the draft resolution contained in document A/50/L.6/Rev.1.

My delegation wishes to stress the fact that the sponsors of draft resolution A/50/L.6, inspired by our desire that this draft resolution should reflect, as broadly as possible, the concerns of all delegations with a view to having the draft adopted by consensus, held several meetings with the sponsors of the amendments in order to accommodate their points of view. Consequently, revised draft resolution A/50/L.6 incorporates new drafting in operative paragraph 3 which reproduces resolution 2480 B (XXIII), of 1968. We firmly believe that this new text adequately reflects the concerns expressed to the sponsors. We therefore regret the fact that those behind these amendments are still maintaining them. Consequently, the delegation of Spain will vote against the amendments contained in documents A/50/L.8 and L.9.

On the other hand, my delegation this morning heard the proposal by the representative of Australia, who suggested additions to both the fourth preambular paragraph of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 and to its operative paragraph 3, which have been distributed in document A/50/L.14. We would like to thank Australia for its constructive contributions to our consideration of draft resolution A/50/L.6, and would like to say that we will vote in favour of those suggestions.

Ms. Fernández de Gurmendi (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation wishes to speak on the proposed amendments to the draft resolution on multilingualism: these are the amendments contained in documents A/50/L.8, L.9 and L.14.

As to the amendments contained in documents A/50/L.8 and A/50/L.9, we would like to say that my delegation has a great deal of sympathy for the difficulties faced by people whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the Organization, although those difficulties are not substantially different from those faced by most delegations in an Organization which is increasingly locking itself into monolingualism.

Despite our sympathy for these difficulties, my delegation feels that the proposed amendments would modify the existing legal regime for staff recruitment and promotion. We believe that modifications to the complex set of personnel procedures require in-depth study to analyse all the possible consequences, including budgetary ones. My delegation will therefore vote against the amendments proposed in documents A/50/L.8 and L.9.

However, my delegation does welcome the amendments proposed by Australia in document A/50/L.14. Indeed, my delegation would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Australia for those amendments, which significantly improve the text of the draft resolution, and wishes to state that it will vote in favour of them.

Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire) (*interpretation from French*): Malaysia has proposed that we replace operative paragraph 3 in document A/50/L.6/Rev.1 with an amended one. We think that if we adopt Malaysia's proposal we would be taking a very regrettable step backward, because it would sanction the very monolingualism that our Organization has striven to avoid ever since it was set up. It is imperative that, in our Organization, we must avoid establishing categories of staff members: those whose mother tongue is one of the official languages of the United Nations, and those whose original language is not. And Malaysia's proposal calls on us to do just this.

This kind of discrimination — or disparity — is quite obviously something we should prohibit. Furthermore, how can we incorporate the idea of a mother tongue into a universal Organization such as ours. With regard to African countries — including mine, where we speak almost 40 "mother tongues" — I cannot even begin to imagine how we would slot ourselves into the United Nations framework. Consequently, my delegation cannot go along with Malaysia's proposal, and, with regard to the Japanese amendment, my delegation, while understanding the concerns and worries of that country, does feel that, in any event, it would be a step backwards from what has been built up ever since the United Nations was established.

My delegation therefore cannot accept those two proposed amendments, but I can say that we do accept the Australian proposal in document A/50/L.14.

Mr. Mustafa (Sudan): The delegation of the Sudan would like to join the group of countries sponsoring draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1.

In the meantime, and in conformity with the spirit of the draft resolution before us, we share the deep concern of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions about the possible adverse effect

of the proposed abolition of the two Language Coordinator posts from the training programme for all official languages of the United Nations.

To this effect, we recall resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987, which affirms that the translation and interpretation budgets of United Nations bodies should be commensurate with needs and should not be subject to budgetary constraints.

Mr. Chinvanno (Thailand): My delegation will be voting against draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 on agenda item 156, "Multilingualism".

We regret that we must so decide, and that the Assembly is taking this course of action on a very important question involving the whole membership of the Organization. My delegation is disappointed that there has not been an adequate opportunity for the whole membership to discuss the provisions of the draft resolution in order to reach consensus.

My delegation feels compelled to vote against the draft resolution because we still have strong reservations about operative paragraph 3, even with the useful amendment proposed by the Permanent Representative of Australia. The paragraph, in our view, has grave implications for personnel matters. In practical terms, requiring a command of two of the six official languages would place at a serious disadvantage personnel and potential recruits whose mother tongue is not one of the six official languages of the Organization.

Thailand wishes to reaffirm its commitment to multiligualism at the United Nations, and to support the idea that the United Nations should promote cultural diversity; but Thailand believes that the promotion of cultural diversity has as its central ideal the concepts of tolerance and understanding, which, in the context of this agenda item, should be extended to those cultures that, by force of history, are not associated with any of the six official languages of this Organization.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): My delegation wishes to reiterate and reaffirm our observations on both the principal draft resolution and the amendments. My delegation wishes to know, in the first place, why this draft resolution is a necessity. Why are we not directing our energy and time to problems within our nations and, indeed, the world over?

Do we intend to dismantle the principle of solidarity at a time when it a matter of necessity within the United Nations? My delegation feels that this draft resolution discriminates against the developing nations, which otherwise have a legitimate right to have their nationals recruited by the Secretariat.

This draft resolution does not indicate the time-frame for Member States to train their nationals so that they qualify for employment by the United Nations.

The problems that face the United Nations do not have their genesis in the use of a particular language. Why, therefore, and why now, is the Organization being made to think of the very tedious matter of which languages should be used as criteria in recruiting Secretariat staff members?

If I may ask, of these languages, how many will be from Africa, where I come from? Have the sponsors of this draft resolution ever thought deeply, when talking of geographical representation — as enshrined in the Charter — about including developing nations and, indeed, my own continent, Africa? Are we being reminded indirectly of those sad days and times when the very same languages we are speaking today were imposed upon us by those who divided us in Africa and in the developing nations elsewhere? Should the United Nations allow that same spirit to prevail and divide this body too? Should we again be instilled with the spirit of divisiveness that, even today, most nations are suffering from?

What is the role of the United Nations? Is it not to promote peace, unity and solidarity? The colonizers had their own agenda when they imposed their languages on the developing nations, especially in Africa. Thanks to the scramble to colonize Africa, we were divided. Should we allow history to repeat itself today within the United Nations?

My delegation would therefore humbly implore this body to give serious consideration before adopting any such a draft resolution, and implores it especially to allow delegations to consult — formally and informally — so that the United Nations is not seen as playing the role of colonizer among the developing nations.

Mr. Albín (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The delegation of Mexico is a sponsor of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1.

For several weeks now, we have been aware of the concerns of some States whose national language is not one of the official languages of the United Nations. In the view of the sponsors, the essential aspects of those concerns have been dealt with in the revised version of the draft resolution, document A/50/L.6/Rev.1. The sponsors have made a genuine effort towards a rapprochement with those countries.

It has been said that the draft resolution would change present practice in hiring and promoting staff members. We are convinced that that is not the case. Paradoxically, the amendments in documents A/50/L.8 and L.9 contain elements that, in our view, would indeed alter the present practice within the Organization if they were adopted.

The sponsors' objective in draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 on multilingualism is a very simple one, and here I am forced to contradict the representative of Swaziland. The draft resolution has to do with the effective use of the official and working languages of the United Nations. It is a question of restoring a healthy linguistic balance in the use of all those languages. The proposals in the draft resolution, which are by any standards objective and reasonable, would be vitiated by the amendments in documents A/50/L.8 and L.9. My delegation will therefore vote against those amendments.

My delegation can, however, support the amendments proposed this morning in a constructive spirit by the Permanent Representative of Australia and now reflected in document A/50/L.14. The delegation of Mexico calls on the Assembly to vote in favour of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 and of the amendments submitted by the Australian delegation in document A/50/L.14, and urges it to vote against the amendments in documents A/50/L.8 and L.9.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote before the voting.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the amendment contained in document A/50/L.9.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Azerbaijan, Barbados, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Croa . Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Georgia, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Togo, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zaire

Abstaining:

Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Maldives, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Slovenia, South Africa, Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia

The amendment was rejected by 88 votes to 37, with 28 abstentions.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the amendment contained in document A/50/L.8.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Croatia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Namibia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe

Against:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Togo, Tunisia, Ukraine, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zaire

Abstaining:

Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Bhutan, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Latvia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Netherlands, Norway, Saint Lucia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia

The amendment was rejected by 93 votes to 26, with 37 abstentions.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the amendment contained in paragraph 2 of document A/50/L.14.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the amendment contained in paragraph 2 of document A/50/L.14?

The amendment was adopted.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the amendment contained in paragraph 1 of document A/50/L.14.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the amendment contained in paragraph 1 of document A/50/L.14?

The amendment was adopted.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now turn to draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1, as amended. A separate vote has been requested on operative paragraph 3 of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1, as amended. There being no objection to this request, we shall now put to the vote operative paragraph 3 of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, India, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Niger, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zaire

Against:

Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Croatia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United States of America

Abstaining:

Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Estonia, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Latvia, Maldives, Mongolia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Saint Lucia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia

Operative paragraph 3 of draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 was adopted by 97 votes to 36, with 29 abstentions.

The Acting President: We now proceed to take action on draft resolution A/50/L.6/Rev.1 as a whole, as amended.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Niger, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zaire

Against:

Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Lesotho, Marshall Islands, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Swaziland, Thailand, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United States of America, Zambia

Abstaining:

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Iceland, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Latvia, Malaysia, Maldives, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Saint Lucia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Draft resolution A/50/L.6/ Rev.1 as a whole, as amended (resolution 50/11) *was adopted by 100 votes to 35, with 29 abstentions.*

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to explain their vote. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Pine (New Zealand): It is with great regret that New Zealand, a multicultural society with two official languages, has found itself unable to support a resolution on multilingualism, a concept that we and every other United Nations Member supports. We are disappointed that a minority of the membership of this body has succeeded in preventing a consensus from being allowed to emerge on this important subject, when 70 Members, from all parts of the globe, had indicated the need for more work to be done.

As the delegate of Malaysia has observed, there is an inescapable irony that on this fiftieth anniversary, in a text that purports to celebrate the diversity of our Organization, we have been unable to accommodate the concern which has been expressed by some of our Members, in particular our friends in the South Pacific and Asia, over the problem faced by countries in which any United Nations language is a second language. This concern has, from the moment it was raised, struck our delegation as genuinely held and reasonable. We remain convinced that, with good faith, it could have been accommodated in the resolution. The fact that it has not been can lead only to the conclusion that some of the sponsors were not really interested in celebrating diversity, but instead were focused only on extending a current privilege at the expense of other linguistic groups that are currently operating in a situation of even greater hardship.

We noted very carefully the statements last night from the sponsors that they did not intend to change the current rules concerning the employment and promotion of United Nations staff. We must admit that this had not been clear to us from the ambiguous language of their draft resolution. Indeed, this was the very reason we had wished further time to negotiate, and the reason we have been unable to support the text before us.

We should like the record of this meeting to reflect the understanding that the current resolution, which has not had the benefit of consideration in the administrative and budgetary Committee, cannot be interpreted as effecting a change in resolution 2480 B (XXIII), including the discretion given to the Secretary-General in subparagraph 1(*b*)(i).

Mr. Kumamaru (Japan): My delegation has been instructed by its Government to make the following statement.

Japan voted against the resolution because its operative paragraph 3 penalizes staff members whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the United Nations. Japan finds the paragraph unacceptable. Such personnel, already at a disadvantage, should not be subjected to an additional penalty.

My delegation regrets that no real effort was made to reach an agreement before the draft resolution was put to the vote. Had there been proper consultations in an appropriate committee, this measure would certainly have been adopted by consensus.

My delegation believes wholeheartedly in the importance of preserving and promoting cultural diversity in the Organization. However, it is precisely for this reason that due respect should be shown for those cultures not associated with the official languages of the United Nations.

Mr. Shin (Republic of Korea): My delegation voted against the draft resolution contained in document A/50/L.6/Rev.1. My delegation holds the view that the United Nations should not penalize personnel whose mother tongue is not one of the six official languages of the United Nations. In my delegation's view, linguistic balance within the Organization could be achieved by encouraging Secretariat staff to gain proficiency in at least one more of the other official languages of the United Nations.

My delegation knows that a significant number of Member States have voted against the resolution. It is my delegation's hope that due consideration will be given to this fact in implementing the resolution.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Croatia would rather have had more time to examine comprehensively this agenda item and undertake further consultations in order to reach a consensus on this important issue.

Croatia firmly supports the principle of multilingualism. For Croatians it has always been necessary to learn languages other than their native tongue in order to be able to communicate with their neighbours and the rest of the international community. However, Croatia is a small country whose official language is not one of the six official languages of the United Nations and whose citizens, prior to applying for a position in the Secretariat, where Croatia is significantly underrepresented, have to learn one of the working languages and continue with studies of the other languages, whether they are employed at the General Service or the Professional level. Therefore, Croatia, bearing in mind the principle of the equality of all United Nations Members, could not support some of the elements contained in the draft resolution that favour some Members over others.

Croatia would also have preferred that the resolution include a request that the Secretary-General take into account the difficulties faced by applicants whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the United Nations.

Mr. Katende (Uganda): Uganda encourages the principle of multilingualism in international relations. However, my delegation regrets that we have taken action hurriedly on this matter. In our view, more consultations were necessary in order to adopt a consensus resolution. In particular, there are certain provisions contained in the resolution just disposed of that required further consultations on the part of my delegation. We were denied this opportunity, which is why we abstained in the voting on the resolution.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 156?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.